



FOLLOWING “THE STAR”

The Story of the Waldrons
and Their Newspaper

THE FAIRHAVEN STAR

By
Mabel Hoyle Knipe

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Charles Dean Waldron-1856-1916

Henry Dean Waldron-1874-1940

Material Researched and Integrated

By

Mabel Hoyle Knipe
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Charles Dean Waldron



Henry Dean Waldron

DEDICATION

This Research Project
FOLLOWING "THE STAR"

—is respectfully dedicated—

to

JOHN B. DeGRAW

who

—kept faith—

with

THE WALDRONS

M.H.K.

FOLLOWING "THE STAR"

The Story of the Waldrons and their Newspaper

CHARLES DEAN WALDRON

In 1879 Fairhaven, Massachusetts drowsed lethargically in a dim glory reflected from days when townsmen had proudly sailed the seven seas — and great whalers built by the wharves at Oxford had slipped from the ways of Poverty Point — and had lain in grace on Acushnet waters. Now, Arctic ice, years of a bitter Civil War and the displacement of whale oil by kerosene had brought an end to this idyllic era. Now, the little town was again only a country village with no claim to fame at all. It had a small tack factory, rough and unlighted streets — and was connected to the city of New Bedford by a floundering ferry and an unpredictable horse car. The townspeople were hardworking but poor — some of them close to penury. There seemed little reason for community pride or civic venture.

During this era of decline in Fairhaven fortunes, Charles Dean Waldron, adoptive citizen of the town, was living at 13 Oxford Street in Oxford Village with his wife and little five-year-old son. He had been born in Fall River in 1856 — son of John and Ruth (Dean) Waldron, and was descended from the Waldrons of Bristol, R.I. and from Richard Warren of "Mayflower" fame. On his mother's side, he was descended from the Deans of Taunton who had sailed from England in 1700. Despite this proud heritage, Charles Waldron was feeling in these early days of 1879 — a great dissatisfaction, for he had not been able to retain gratifying work, and he and his little family were living in decidedly straitened circumstances with bleak prospects.

Yet Charles Waldron had always been a man of vigor and enterprise. Moreover, his nose twitched to the odor of printer's ink, and his blood soared to the pound of the presses. As a youngster in school in Fall River and New Bedford — he had issued a four-page advertising folder called *THE LEISURE MOMENT*. This venture had contained a story or two and large numbers of advertisements laboriously solicited. The little enterprise had kept the editor in pocket money, and he had bought a small supply of type which he zealously guarded.

At the conclusion of his school days, he found he could not shake off his great interest in a newspaper career — and set about augmenting his sparse experience by taking a job in a printing establishment, thus learning the rudiments of the trade. He gained much from this training, but the day came when he realized that he was merely an apprentice and working for a pittance, with sparse hope of advancement. Brooding about the encroaching decadence of his little adopted town — it suddenly occurred to him that

what Fairhaven needed was its very own newspaper to invoke less of pride in past, and more of investment in future! Although, over the years, there had been several abortive efforts to establish one Fairhaven, at this time, had no newspaper

So it was that with typical vigor and ingenuity, young Waldron set up office in his Oxford Street home — bringing out that hoard of precious type carefully cherished from the *LEISURE MOMENT* enterprise. He borrowed a little more from the offices of *THE NEW BEDFORD MERCURY* where he was known and liked, and a nearby neighbor supplied a small store of larger display type which was invaluable. There were not many of these display type letters — just enough to spell out a very short title — and so, of necessity, the new journal became *THE STAR*.

The decision once made to sponsor a newspaper, Mr Waldron never looked back. He went to the old Fairhaven Iron Foundry where he had forms cast to allow him to set a four-page newspaper, three columns wide and eight and a half inches long. The whole of the next week was spent hurrying about soliciting advertisements and gathering local news items throughout the far-flung town. Then he selected a few pleasant poems and some sharp little narratives. It is a bit unclear where he got these, but one suspects that he wrote some of them himself! Then, if he came out short — he planned to fill empty spaces with articles set already in type by New Bedford dailies. Thus, he established a grim program for even a young and enterprising journalist — yet, in Charles Waldron's case, even more devastating problems had to be solved, for now his paper was ready for printing — and he had no press!

On February 18, 1879, from his home office at 13 Oxford Street, he brought out his finished forms and placed them carefully in his garden wheelbarrow waiting in readiness near the front steps. In high excitement, he trundled the barrow across the bridge to the offices of *THE NEW BEDFORD MERCURY*. Here he had to do some dickering, for he had no ready cash and very shaky credit. However, he obtained a printing when he offered his precious type as security. Later that day, with sharp winds buffeting him all the way, he wheeled back across the bridge an exciting cargo — 1,000 copies of Volume 1, Number 1 of *THE STAR*! These he distributed personally and free of charge among his delighted townspeople.

Despite an assumed non-chalance, and such supreme dedication it is evident that the new editor was a bit nervous about the success of this venture in which he had invested so much energy, hope, and, at last — even his precious type! Indeed, in the first issue, he commented humbly in a short editorial:

“We cannot expect the public support unless we merit it, therefore, it will be for our interest to make our paper all that it should be. We can but try. If it don't suit, why we suspend as a matter of course.”

Yet, the desire to lift his little town out of current doldrums is warmly apparent. In the same editorial column, he queries:

“Must Fairhaven always remain the quiet old town that it is at present? If it must, why? Are not our facilities for doing business equally as good as those of our neighbors across the way?

“It is said by many that Fairhaven has seen her best days. Most assuredly we hope not. Fairhaven must revive. She has lain dormant long enough. The ‘season’ is at hand! Let her ‘come out’ and make her appearance in public, put her best foot forward and exclaim, while rubbing the cobwebs out of her eyes,

‘Here we are again! We are not dead, only sleeping!’”

Later, he commented a bit testily:

“...if the people generally will WAKE UP, we may yet claim that we are second to none in point of prosperity!”

Indeed, it soon became apparent that Fairhavenites were not averse to a bit of scolding or to ‘waking up, for the little *STAR* rapidly became very popular, and Charles Waldron worked inhumanly hard to please. To augment his income, he developed a little job-printing business, and was forced to hire another man to help with this and with setting up the paper. He himself worked all day visiting prospective advertisers, collecting advertisements, and surveying town news. In the evening he occupied himself by sticking type. On Friday night he omitted sleep completely and spent the long hours in setting up the paper in final form. On Saturday morning he began his long trek across the bridge to *THE MERCURY* office, and returned some hours later his wheel-barrow heavy with the completed copies. Then he would immediately begin the fatiguing work of distribution.

Happy results from this arduous schedule became apparent. Receipts from advertising began to grow, and it was possible to buy extra type and fill the pages with more and more of the editor's own witty comment, delightful town items and accounts of warm community activity. On June 7, 1879, the first page of the paper sported a completed banner *FAIRHAVEN STAR*

and the page width expanded to four columns, while the length grew to ten inches. It was also with this issue that the price of 1¢ or 50¢ a year ‘in advance’ was assigned. By this time the little paper had become extraordinarily dear to townspeople and the editor found he was selling even more copies when he began charging for them!

By the end of the first year of publication, another enlargement of the paper occurred, and Mr Waldron set aside \$300 to purchase his own press! At this time the Fairhaven Iron Foundry made small printing presses, and

one of the older models was chosen. Appropriately the little press was called the "Fairhaven." It was, of course, not a power press, but was driven by the hand turning of a crank as paper was fed slowly into it. A respected Fairhaven native, Benjamin Jenney, turned the crank and would allow few others to perform the rite. When, on occasion, he became thoroughly exhausted, he would let only the editor himself take his place.

It is said that the new press made a terrific din, and every town citizen within several blocks knew when *THE STAR* had gone to press. This was a distinct advertising advantage!

With this burgeoning of *THE STAR*'S fortunes, Mr Waldron found it necessary to move from his Oxford Street home address — an office which had taken on a highly professional caliber. A series of rather dramatic changes of locale — puzzling to follow — ensued. The first move, in August, 1880, was to 43 Centre Street where a sign was erected across the face of the new abode *THE FAIRHAVEN STAR*. Later, in June of 1883, a move was made to a building on Main Street just north of Centre Street. This little place had had a colorful history. It had once stood on the west side of Middle Street, north of the Rufus Allen house which is considered to be one of the oldest houses in town. In its current site on Main Street, Mr Waldron published *THE STAR* through some very challenging years.

When in June of 1900, Henry H. Rogers was engaged in erection of the Masonic Building — a very old house, the Horatio Jenney house — was razed. Mr Waldron took advantage of the space thus created to move his little building across the empty cellar hole, down the Centre Street coasting hill, to Water Street, and thence through Ferry Street to the corner of Main and Ferry where it still stands. It gave yeoman service, but had to be abandoned in 1902 for the larger building next door which henceforth became headquarters for the paper until its demise in 1966-67

There were other changes, too, as the years passed. Mr. Waldron's son, Henry Dean Waldron, was growing up amid the fervor of newspaper making. It is, therefore, not surprising that he became enamored of the process, and as enthusiastic as his father. All through his school days, he labored in the *STAR* office. He learned how to stick type, helped in the news gathering — and being a very observant lad — mastered the mechanics of setting up and printing the paper. As the years passed, Charles Waldron granted more and more responsibility to this clever son, and deferred often to his sterling judgement.

After Henry's graduation, he worked for a few months on a famous Boston daily, but when he felt his father needed his assistance, he returned to become head of the news department of *THE STAR*. Charles and Henry Waldron thus worked together — father and son — for many years. They must have known keen satisfaction in this steady family support, and in a partnership devoted to their composite dream and to the welfare of a townspeople they had come to understand, to respect and to love.

Charles D. Waldron died of a heart attack on March 25, 1916, after publishing *THE STAR* for thirty-seven years. Of him, *THE NEW BEDFORD MERCURY*, in obituary, commented:

"He was a man who had no enemies."

However, more moving than all the usual encomiums at death, were words that had appeared about him in the same paper while he was still alive and practicing his conscientious editorship:

" 'We used to call him Charley, years ago,' said a gentleman who has long been connected with the printing business in this city. 'That was when he was in the beginning of his enterprise with a little half amateur sheet in Fairhaven. I remember sitting in our office one morning the first time I ever saw him, when he came in and bought a little paper — a rather shrinking fellow, but with something about him to attract attention. 'Who is that?' I said to the clerk, after the young man had made his purchase and departed. 'That is Charley Waldron,' he replied 'lives over in Fairhaven; has a little paper that he is trying to make go; guess he has to work pretty hard, but it looks as if he had good stuff in him, and maybe he will make a success.'"

" 'After that I came to know him better, for he used our place to a considerable extent as a source of supplies. He got to be rather a favorite in the business office, though he never was one of those effusive chaps who try to make friends by the frothiness of their demeanor. And I fancy the business manager was rather glad to help him out with many of his modest wants when the *STAR* was a good deal of a doubtful experiment, and when young Waldron was working harder and many more hours than most managers of great metropolitan dailies.

" 'So he came for paper and ink and type-set — and he was as welcome as if he had come in with a fat slice of business. That was because he was pleasant, courteous, industrious, and as much in earnest about his little business as he would have been had he been at the head of a great enterprise. We saw his gradual attainment of a modest prosperity with a vast amount of pleasure, for the word always was that Charley Waldron deserved it if anybody did' "

HENRY DEAN WALDRON

Of no less stature was the son Charles Waldron left behind. Henry Dean Waldron, at his father's death, assumed complete charge of *THE STAR*. Bringing to the publication methods practiced by the sophisticated Boston daily, for which he had worked for seven months, he still maintained in each issue, the neighborly yet challenging editor-to-reader confrontation which can exert so much power in a journal servicing the citizenry of a small New England town. In return, the new editor received the same staunch support which had been granted his father and which had made of *THE STAR* a unique mirror to reflect the lives and times of Fairhaven people.

In 1923 Henry Waldron purchased a Whitlock two-revolution cylinder press, the largest in this part of the state. His comments at the time of purchase show his delight in the acquisition and in the long awaited goal of making *THE STAR* into an eight page paper. At this time — because he was a man of sentiment — Henry Waldron did not forget his father

He wrote:

"The late Charles D. Waldron, who founded *THE STAR* and carried on the business for nearly forty years had planned to change *THE STAR* into an eight page paper, and it gives the present management the greatest pleasure and satisfaction to be able to carry out the plans of the founder of this business."

Elsewhere, he stated:

"The management desires to take advantage of this opportunity to give the greater share of the credit for what one *STAR* reader describes as a 'triumph' — to the late Charles Dean Waldron, who founded *THE STAR* in 1879, and conducted the business until his death in 1916. It was through his efforts that the business was established upon a sound basis and became a success; and without the foundation which he builded through a lifetime of effort, the present improvements in *THE STAR* would not have been possible. We do not wish our readers to forget this important point. Credit should go where credit is due."

Out of sentimental attachment also for the old hand press which had served faithfully for so many years, and which now must be discarded, Mr Waldron says:

"---the old Fairhaven press, made in Fairhaven at the old Iron Foundry on Laurel Street, where Tabith Inn now stands was a good press, and we were proud of it. It was not an expensive press, but it 'delivered the goods' "

These quotations in themselves demonstrate the quality of the man who now assumed leadership of *THE STAR*. Again and again, a similar gentle humility spilled upon the pages of the paper endearing the editor to the readers and instilling faith in his fairness and trust in his opinion.

As man of his era — he could no longer employ the broad ebullient wit of his father, but he brought, nonetheless, a steady optimism to the writing, and it is said that he always signed his personal correspondence: "Cheerfully yours!"

He was sharply resourceful, too. The paper began to assume a hesitant sophistication. Photography was more frequently employed, and syndicated articles on fashions, recipes, and foreign news appeared. Horizons expanding as they had to in the twenties after the heart-break years of World War I — brought a demand for careful research into national and international trends. This homework was done efficiently, and editorial approach to current problems demonstrated a wise comprehension of the lessons of history. In such comment Henry Waldron spoke starkly in simple structure free of guile.

As gradually the paper format changed to feature stories of state, nation and world on Page one — under flaring headline — always at least one Fairhaven story appeared there, too, made similarly important by large letter type. It is as if *STAR* readers were being subtly assured of their worth in a fearfully expanding world difficult of comprehension.

Both Charles and Henry Waldron had always valued the hundreds of written communications from readers, and a printing was consistently assured them. Letters motivated by avarice, political aspiration, sarcasm, patriotism, testiness, resentment and joy are spread all through the pages of *THE STAR*. They are, for the most part, surprisingly literate, and they provide an invaluable record of the thinking and the emotional convolutions of scores of Fairhavenites during sixty stressful years of change and confusion.

As had been his father Henry Waldron became a town leader in charitable endeavors and benevolent projects. He lent the services of the paper to hundreds of worthy causes. Always the good of his green little town with its softly curling ocean edges was foremost in his endeavors, and he never affronted the sensibilities of his towns-people or patronized them.

In the fall of 1932 Henry Waldron suffered a slight shock, and was forced to a hard decision. An article printed in the December 21st, 1933 issue of his paper and entitled "Valedictory" states:

"I have decided to sell *THE FAIRHAVEN STAR* to my employes. They merit this preference on my part because of their loyalty to me at all times, but especially since I was stricken. When this happened they carried on in the same

manner as if the business was their own. The business has an honorable record, and I am sure this record will be maintained by the new owners.

"I wish to extend to the public my appreciation for its generous patronage to my father and myself for nearly sixty years. The experience and delightful friendships established will ever be treasured in memory "

In his retirement Henry Waldron continued a consistent interest in the paper. In his tight little home at 20 Main Street, he read hundreds of books keeping a careful record and synopsis of each. He compiled an immense index of quotations by great men hoping it might some day be published as aid to scholars — and he turned out some gentle and happy poetry.

Henry Waldron died at his home in Fairhaven on December 7, 1940, at the age of sixty-six.

AFTER THE WALDRONS

As Henry Waldron had wished, his paper was purchased by a corporation of seven former employes with George H. Atwood as editor. To gain working capital, shares were sold at \$10 each, and every towns-person was invited to buy two shares that the paper might survive. There was a tremendous outpouring of generosity and interest. Even President Franklin Roosevelt bought two shares, and Lady Fairhaven extended her patronage from her home in England.

This corporation existed for three years, keeping the paper alive. In 1936 Harold Turner Watson, editor and publisher of *THE DARTMOUTH NEWS* bought *THE STAR*. Because of ill health, he was forced to relinquish both journals two years later to John B. DeGraw, a trained and experienced newspaper man, who published *THE STAR* with distinction and success until 1966. Throughout the thirty years of his editorship, Mr DeGraw was a worthy successor to the Waldrons — keenly sensitive to his responsibility as a newsman, and to the traditions of the paper.

In 1966, the paper was again sold, whereupon an apparent combination of financial stress and disinterest brought to an end a veritable Fairhaven tradition — and the doughty little *STAR* — 87 years old — became forever silent!

EPILOGUE

To turn today the yellowed pages of early *STARS* is to take a trip into nostalgia — a walk into a day when friendship and neighborly concern were stroked into being by a strong sense of common humanity, and sustained by a simple faith in sure divinity. Charles Waldron was at home in these gentle airs. He cared in depth, and his townspeople knew it. Brides sent him slices of wedding cake; children brought the first spring flowers as genuine news — in bedraggled bunch — to his office door.

So he exclaims in his columns:

"A subscriber brings to our office a giant stalk of rhubarb grown in his garden. The stalk is 25 inches long, and it weighs 1 lb., 6 oz."

"Mr. Elbridge Paull will please accept our thanks for a bouquet of handsome roses."

"Mr. Daniel Deane presents us with a handsome bluefish caught in his pound yesterday morning."

Sometimes he becomes gently derisive and says:

"If everyone would put sand or ashes on the icy walks, we should have fewer accidents. *THE STAR* — fewer news items!"

"Conductor Spooner has placed an automatic light in front of his premises on Bridge Street. It eclipses the town lights."

Often he speaks as the philosopher:

"A loving wife will skim off the cream for her husband's strawberries, and use skimmed milk for her own."

"The first worms of the season are in the apples!"

He is perhaps at his best when he roundly scolds:

"Fairhaven has been called a dead town, but it is not. It only seems as if half the people were asleep and the other half were round kind of quiet like so as not to wake them up!"

Occasionally, he is decidedly low humor when he relates a bit of Fairhaven drama:

"A carpenter who was shingling a house on Centre Street was made a victim of by the boys who removed the ladder he was using, leaving the carpenter roosting on the ridge pole. After the boys had had sufficient fun they replaced the ladder and quickly dusted."

There is an apocryphal story told of H. H. Rogers in his special car — tossing aside his bankers' journals and renowned metropolitan dailies and calling loudly for a copy of *THE FAIRHAVEN STAR*! Be this as it may — the experience of reading the preserved copies of this newspaper should be enjoyed by each Fairhaven citizen. He will be cheered, enlightened, and occasionally — deeply stirred. But most of all, he will feel truly at home in his own humanity — after he has consulted the Waldrons!



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